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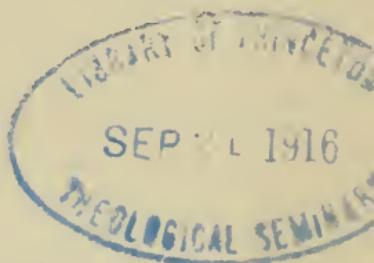






# THE BOOK OF JONAH

A STUDY OF  
BIBLICAL PURPOSE AND METHOD



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## The Book of Jonah

amanuensis. The purpose of the story is quite independent of the personality of its writer, and would receive no enforcement from the mere knowledge of his name, or even of his place in history. In this respect the Book stands on its own merits, and needs no further illumination or backing from the direction of its earthly source.

For the Prime Author was God the Holy Ghost. Under His suggestion it germinated in the mind of the Old Testament thinker by whom it was written out, in accordance with the principle that "no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter i. 21). And of the so-called 'wonders' postulated at certain points in the narrative by the literalist school of interpretation, none is to be compared with the miracle that a book carrying us to such a viewpoint, and written with such a purpose as we shall find in this story of Jonah, could have been produced in the Church of Judaism.

It is "the Book of Jonah," not as claiming to have been written by Jonah, but because it is *about* Jonah; it is called by the name of its hero, rather than by any summary of its subject-matter,

and is, as we should say nowadays, "the Story of Jonah."

Our study of the Book, then, is neither complicated, nor assisted, by considerations connected with the personality of its author. Naturally, in the next place, we ask how we stand in regard to external information about the hero of the story. And here, again, it will appear that our position is probably not very different.

In 2 Kings xiv. 25, there is a passing allusion to a prophet of the same name, Jonah the son of Amittai, who came forward to encourage Jeroboam II., the king of Israel, about B.C. 780 (and therefore early in that king's reign), in his campaigns against the Syrians for the extension of his kingdom; with the result that the Israelite frontiers were pushed to the furthest limits that they ever reached. The utterances of this prophet have not come down to us: had they done so, they might (as Professor Driver suggested) have formed an interesting companion-volume to the announcements of the prophet Amos, in the later years of the same king's reign, that these conquests were soon to be forfeited.

But our little Book was not written until long after the days of that Jonah.  
**Date.** Various considerations seem to compel us to this conclusion.

(a) First, there are hints suggested by the historical allusions in the Book. Thus the writer finds it well to explain to his readers the vast size of Nineveh (iii. 3<sup>b</sup>), of which, apparently, they would not all necessarily be aware because it was then a thing of the past ; but in the time of the prophet Jonah Nineveh was at the height of its greatness, and it was not overthrown till nearly two hundred years later (B.C. 606). Contrary, also, to the usual custom of Old Testament writers, our author refers to "the king of Nineveh" indefinitely without mention of his name (iii. 6) ; as if he were at no pains to discover it, or at any rate it would be of no interest to his readers. And indeed it may be questioned whether the Assyrian king would ever have been designated by the title "King of Nineveh" at all, whilst that Empire was still in existence.

(b) Then there is the evidence afforded by the particular period of Hebrew literary style which the Book represents. Its Hebrew is generally akin to that used in the Books of Ezra and

Nehemiah, which were written at least a century after the Return from Babylon, and therefore (at the earliest possible computation) more than 150 years subsequent to the fall of Nineveh. Moreover, it exhibits certain Aramaic words and phrases of whose introduction into Palestine we have no trace until after the Babylonian Exile.

(c) And, again, there are the marks which the Book shows of its literary relationship and kindred. The general viewpoint of thought seems to have been caught from the great prophets who lived later than the Jonah of the Book of Kings ; see, for instance, Jeremiah xviii. 7, 8. Indeed the section of the story in which the sea-monster is introduced may have been suggested by Jeremiah's representation (li. 34, 44) of the Babylonian Captivity as the swallowing-up of God's people by a dragon ; which itself may possibly be a natural extension of the figure in Isaiah xxvii. 1 (except for the uncertain date of that chapter) of the secular power as "the dragon of the sea." At any rate, the facile retort that Jeremiah might have borrowed his figure from our author is precluded by the other time-marks which we have noted for our Book. Similarly, it is to be observed that the "prayer" in chap. ii.

is almost entirely composed of snatches from Psalms, contained in the Psalter, of which some are decidedly not of early date.

Such, then, are a few simple instances of reasons which, taken together, would seem to suggest that

**Conclusion.** we shall be most likely to make a sympathetic study of the Book if we regard it as embodying a thoughtful outlook upon the external relations of the Church by a particularly enlightened and far-seeing preacher, who lived some little time (at least) after the return from Babylon in B.C. 536 ; possibly not before B.C. 400, but at any rate almost three centuries later than the prophet Jonah, and within little distance (one side or the other) of the point where the historical narrative of the Old Testament closes with the later work of Ezra and Nehemiah.

## CHAPTER II

### THE STORY

BEFORE we approach further questions, it may be well to set out the main points of the story.

Chapter i. opens by showing us a prophet of Israel under orders from God to go and preach a mission in Nineveh, 600 miles away to the N.E. of Palestine, the capital of the great Assyrian Empire which (from the standpoint of time adopted by the writer for his story) was destined eventually to overthrow and obliterate the Kingdom of Israel. He sought to avoid the commission, for a reason which does not appear until it bursts forth with passionate indignation at chap. iv. 2; viz. because he divined that such a mission, by bringing the people of Nineveh to repentance, would avert the judgment which was impending over their present wickedness—a judgment which his bigotry desired should be

left to have full course upon them. His quick intuition of the Divine mercy might well have suggested to him, as a servant of God, his own inconsistency and unworthiness in adopting a counter attitude towards it, when he had the opportunity of acting as its minister ; but our author knows well that the human will does not so easily move in harmony with the quicker and better promptings of the heart. He has set himself to depict the instinctive working of the unregenerate mind, and it is one of his remarkable achievements that in so short an essay he has managed to pack so full a presentment of the natural man's attitude towards his fellows.

Accordingly availing himself of the popular belief among ancient Orientals that each country was under the unchallenged charge of its own particular god,\* he boldly represents his hero

\* This without in any way necessarily implying that a prophet of Israel could ever imagine any part of God's earth to be beyond His Presence : the item is simply part of the stage-mechanism of the story, borrowed, along with the sea-monster, from the store of popular fancy. Otherwise, were we compelled to safeguard the prophet's credit, on literalist lines of interpretation, from the charge of such an unnatural supposition, such charge is equally precluded by the alternative explanation that the words (ver. 3) rendered "from the presence of the Lord" may as fairly be translated "from being before the Lord," with the technical meaning of "standing

as attempting to escape from the area of Jehovah's jurisdiction by embarking on a ship bound for the Phenician colony of Tartessus in the extreme Western Mediterranean—and therefore in exactly the opposite direction to that whither his commission had directed him. But the vessel was overtaken by a terrific gale, which the crew attributed to the anger of God against some grievous sinner in their company: by casting lots they trace the offence to the presence of Jonah in the ship, and at last, with touching reluctance, yield to his proposal that they should cast him overboard. The sea at once becomes calm, and the ship disappears from our view on its course, while Jonah is preserved through being swallowed alive by a huge sea-monster.

Chapter ii. describes Jonah as praying in the belly of the monster; from which, after three days and three nights, he is vomited forth on to a coast which is not specified by name.

before him in the position of an attendant"; in which case the intention of the phrase, as an expression of Jonah's purpose, would be to denote that he wished to escape from the duty by resigning his office of a prophet. His subsequent flight to Tarshish would then represent an attempt to drown any memory of desertion in the distractions afforded by the secular interests of busy human society in another part of the world.

Thereupon (chapter iii.), in the Divine forbearance, his commission is renewed; and this time he obediently preaches over one-third of Nineveh, with such effect that (apparently, before he has time to carry his undertaking further) the entire population, from the king downwards, with one mind betake themselves to penitence, observe a rigid public fast, and—as Jonah had anticipated—turn aside the threatened visitation of God.

The closing chapter brings us to the moral climax of the story, in the final crisis between the prophet and his God. We are shown Jonah, in sullen but deep-rooted indignation, seated outside the city which he has saved, and passionately demanding that he might die because the one desire of his life—that he might witness the destruction of the mighty enemy which threatened the life of his own nation—had been thwarted. Then, by a rapid series of dramatic orderings in the sphere of Physical Nature, God touches the prophet's own heart with concern for the loss of a mere vegetable, and thereby symbolically justifies His own tender regard for the teeming human life in the city.

## CHAPTER III

### HISTORY OR FICTION ?

THE great outstanding doctrine which it is the author's purpose to enforce, and the beautiful accessory truths which he illustrates on the way, are in no degree affected by the question whether he wrote to perpetuate the significance of certain actual occurrences, or whether he is conveying instruction through the more elastic methods of allegory. But the Book throughout repeatedly provokes the question, with an insistence which presses for notice ; and, under whichever of these two aspects the individual reader in his private capacity may (as, under the circumstances, he is at liberty to do) prefer to regard the Book, it is hardly possible for us in our public relationship, as members of the Christian Society, to dismiss the question offhand without leaving perplexities in the minds of others, which may seriously divert The problem.

their attention from the real purpose of the tract or at any rate confuse its rightful effect upon them.

At the outset it must be allowed that there is room for a conjecture that at least some parts of *A supposi-* the story may have a historical origin, *tion.* in that the prophet Jonah mentioned in the Book of Kings might quite possibly have gone on a mission to Nineveh. The campaigns of Jeroboam II. against the Syrians, in which he was expressly encouraged by that prophet, owed their success to the fact that (under God) the Syrians had at that time been already so weakened by the Assyrians that they had not the strength to beat him off; and it is therefore open to us to conceive that Jonah might afterwards have been stirred by a religious impulse to make some return to the Assyrians through a religious mission to their capital. Or he might have been actuated by a double—a politico-religious—motive; for it is obvious that, when the power of Syria was broken, Israel itself lay exposed as the next temptation to Assyrian aggressiveness. But the time for this visitation had not yet arrived in Jehovah's purposes for His people—see 2 Kings xiii. 23, and xiv. 27; so that Jonah might

possibly have felt moved to attempt a mission which should introduce at Nineveh a dissuasive from such temptation. All this, of course, is pure conjecture ; but, as we shall see, it is worth bearing in mind (see page 21).

When, however, we go further, we get on to more delicate ground and are met by real difficulties. It is true that the later Jews <sup>Ancient</sup> may largely have accepted the Book <sup>opinion.</sup> as a record of actual events—see, for instance, Tobit xiv. 4, 8 ; 3 Macc. vi. 8 ; Josephus A. J. IX. x. 2 ; but the study of History teaches us that there is generally for every race a period when, for the time being, the poetry and folklore of earlier ages is liable to be interpreted literally, as strict history. Similarly in the Christian Church insufficient allowance for ancient literary methods, coupled with a literal conception of our Lord's allusions to Jonah, tended in many directions to perpetuate the same view of the story.

But there are elements in the Book which, while they present real obstacles in the way of the historical estimate, yet strongly <sup>Superficial</sup> suggest another outlook and applica- <sup>objections.</sup> tion for the Book—one more consistent and

illuminative. A certain type of criticism, as facile as it is shallow, will, of course, always fasten on such points as God's express preparation of a sea-monster for a precise occasion, the capacity of any marine animal to retain a living man in its stomach, the improbability of its casting him forth on to dry land, the precocious growth of a gourd large enough to shelter a man, and so on. But such so-called "difficulties" do not come within sight of the real questions that are at stake for a right estimate of the Book. Indeed we may well blush at the necessity for recognising that people, presumably otherwise intelligent, can ever have so entirely missed the thread of the Book as to allow such irrelevancies to detain their attention, though they could smile at the stupidity which should similarly criticise Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner"—a tale curiously akin to the Story of Jonah, both in its machinery and its purpose. This little essay is not written to uphold the literal historical interpretation of the Book, which has far more doughty champions, well able to take care of themselves, in Dr. Pusey, Keil, Archdeacon Perowne, J. Kennedy, and others; but this much, on the subject of the above particular "difficulties," we may remark

in passing—We are told that careful research has found, within human experience elsewhere, parallels to all the above occurrences ; but, even if it had failed to do so, a sober and intelligent Theism would find no need to question the Divine ability and willingness to bring such things about, *if they were necessary.*

But, to the aspect from which we are regarding the Book, they are not necessary ; and we are not concerned to combat for their <sup>The real</sup> problems. actual occurrence. As a matter of fact, the removal of such trivial difficulties (whether by proof, disproof, or any other method of dissipation) would in no way relieve the real obstacles which beset the assumption that the story is a strict record of facts. For the really serious difficulties in the way of that view arise, not from hesitations in regard to what is loosely called “the miraculous,” but on the score of history itself. Thus—

(a) The conversion of the city of Nineveh cannot be reconciled with the notorious complete fulfilment of the terrible utterances against it of the Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Nahum.

(b) Such a comprehensive religious revolution

among so vast a population, and in a moment of time, is not only without any parallel, it is without any hint of contemplation, in the Sacred History—indeed, it is contrary to all experience of God's dealings with mankind.

(c) It is inexplicable that so remarkable an occurrence should not only have left no trace of itself in Assyria, but should have impressed no mark of any kind upon the references to Nineveh elsewhere in the Old Testament; on the contrary, the Old Testament invariably represents the Assyrians as idolaters, and aliens from Jehovah to the last.

(d) And, in view of the character uniformly attributed to the Assyrian kings, not only in the pages of the Old Testament, but also on their own inscriptions which have come down to us in such abundance, it is altogether inconceivable that any one of them could have acted as this story depicts.

These are serious considerations, which must be taken into account as guiding our way to the **The solution.** point of view from which the Book is to be estimated. So far as our present information goes, they can only be duly honoured by our abandoning the facile assumption of its

literal historicity, and gratefully accepting the reasoned judgment that the Book is a work of fiction—though fiction written for a very definite and practical purpose, in which it has proved eminently successful. The researches of modern scholarship into the history of Jewish literature have shown how this estimate fits the Book into its place in that literature; whilst to say that it dissolves the so-called “difficulties” of the historical interpretation is to touch only the least important point at issue: it will be found to give the Book a freer and wider scope, and to concentrate a single and intenser light, secure from side-draughts, upon its sublime lesson.

We have already noticed (page 17) that quite possibly the prophet Jonah, some four centuries or more before our author's day, **The author's** might have been impelled to undertake **method.** a mission to Nineveh. If there were (though we do not know that there was, nor is it at all essential that there should have been) a tradition among the Jews to this effect, then it would only have been in accordance with the method of many among their later writers that such tradition should have suggested to our author the foundation of his moral tale—just as, indeed, it has been surmised

that some of our Lord's parables may have been freely based upon matters of notoriety at the time.

But, whatever the exact starting-point in the author's mind, his handling of his subject soon shows, and appears intended to show, that he is quite fancy-free from the strict happenings of History or of Physical Nature. He is writing with the single purpose of displaying a great religious truth. In order to invest it with colour and vividness, he presents it under the aspect of a historical tale ; exactly as is done (to cite a parallel from another section of Holy Writ) by the writer of the first six chapters of Daniel, or (from our own English literature, though without the expressly religious purpose) in many of the plays of Shakespeare or novels of Sir Walter Scott—to none of which quarters would an accurate student resort for the purposes of strict historical research. But when he has borrowed enough of such rays from real life to have imparted brightness and movement to his subject, he strikes off on independent lines altogether, and allows the moral instruction which is his real theme to express itself through the free play of his imagination.

Yet he does not omit—we might almost say, he is careful—to provide a clear and honest hint that he is not to be considered as writing history, because he abruptly and significantly drops the historical *rôle* just at points where a historian would be scrupulous to set forth the facts. Such details as the matter and form of Jonah's preaching at Nineveh, the specific faults which he brought home to the different classes of its inhabitants, the subsequent history of the spiritual revival among them, or the effect produced on Jonah himself by the lesson of the gourd—such are instances of precisely the topics upon which, if the author had been purposing to add to our knowledge of history and the making of history, the practice of other Old Testament annalists would have led us to expect from him careful information.

We conclude, then, that the Book of Jonah is a sacred allegory, somewhat resembling the symbolical narratives in Hosea iii. and <sup>Conclusion.</sup> Jeremiah xiii. 3 to 7, or the first two chapters of the Book of Job, but more closely akin still to the parables of our Lord—all of which are themselves only instances of widely prevailing Jewish methods for the conveyance of

moral lessons. Whether, or not, it be based upon a fragment of tradition, we cannot say: it is enough that, in the mind of the author, for some reason,\* "Jonah the son of Amittai" stands for the typical Jew; the name is but the die on the coin, necessary to give it circulation in the currency of speech—what is of intrinsic value is not the name, but the character, of the hero. Indeed we may do well to remind ourselves again that it is possible to attach excessive importance to the whole question of the historicity of the story, and thereby to be led into dallying down a profitless by-path. It may even be open to question whether a stiff stand for the literal historicity of the moral stories of the Old Testament does not defeat its own purpose. "The letter killeth"; and an inflexible literalism may unintentionally be the cause of serious loss to other inquirers who perhaps only see far enough to realise the embarrassments of the mechanical interpretation, and therefore, with the agility of the light-armed, leap to the conclusion that the

\* In which connection it is worth noting that in the Rabbinic literature a favourite symbol for the people of Israel is the Dove, and that the name "Jonah" means "dove." (See Edersheim, "Life and Times of the Messiah," Bk. II., ch. xii. *fn.*)

credit of all such sections of the Bible falls along with that method of exegesis, and so dismiss the whole of them from further serious attention.

But the great and wide-reaching doctrine proclaimed by this story is of vital and imperishable value. What that doctrine is, we shall endeavour to draw out in a later chapter ; but for the present moment it may be worth while to invite a passing consideration whether the allegorical estimate, so far from despoiling the Book of any of its truth and effectiveness, does not show it endowed with the more suggestiveness and cogency. For such a story would seem to be told, not as using the case of an individual to *prove* a doctrine, but rather in order to focus the doctrine into a particular *illustration* that it may the more readily arrest our attention, be seen in its full significance, and thus provoke us to examine its proofs in the larger and nearer field of life all around ourselves. As a proof of the doctrine, it would be of little value ; a single case proves little or nothing ; to later ages the conviction of an individual in the remote past is of little weight, except as proposing to them its verification in their own day ; and the only evidences that we recognise for doctrinal

truths are complex and cumulative. But as putting forward a doctrine through the medium of a concrete individual experience, the story stands for all time as the pointed statement of a truth, of which it suggests that each subsequent generation should satisfy itself by observing its working in present life. It is offered to us, then, not as a final proof of the doctrine, but as an authoritative index-finger pointing us to a doctrine which we might otherwise overlook, or as a starting-point from which we are warranted in setting forth to track out its evidences in our own experience of life: and this is the only procedure which can *prove* a truth, *i.e.* can make it a living reality to living men. So, in this action and reaction of past and present in God's Church, we have one instance of that unity of spiritual life which belongs to His people through all ages—the past living in its ministry to the present, the present honouring the past by drawing upon its life and extending its ministry in ever-widening directions, but all equally of and in and through "the One Spirit." (1 Cor. xii. 11.)

## CHAPTER IV

### OUR LORD AND JONAH

BUT if the view of our author's method which we have adopted be correct, there at once comes up a question which must be fairly faced before we proceed to examine the special truth which his little book propounds for contemplation. Reasonably enough we shall be asked—But does not our Lord expressly allude to the Book of Jonah as if it were a strictly historical record ? Nay more, does not the purpose for which He introduces the person of Jonah into His argument rigidly require that the experiences narrated of Jonah must actually have taken place, if His reference to Jonah were to serve that purpose at all ? Unless Jonah were really and truly in the whale's belly, where is the " sign " that the Son of Man should be really and truly buried and raised to life again ? And if there were no actual

general conversion of the pagans of Nineveh, what force remains in His warning that they should stand up in the judgment with the Israel of His day and should condemn it? (St. Matt. xii. 39-41; xvi. 4: St. Luke xi. 29-32.)

Let us keep, for the moment, to the first of these inquiries. Does our Lord's appeal to this **1. Our Lord's** story require that it should really be **use of** a piece of actual biography? We **Scripture.** shall scarcely think so if we consider His methods as a Teacher of faith and morals. We are significantly advised that He spake the word unto men "as they were able to bear it," whilst more advanced teaching was reserved for communication amid freer opportunities "privately to His own disciples" (St. Mark iv. 33, 34); and, furthermore, that even with these members of His own inner circle there were limits to their powers of understanding, which, for the time, He was obliged to recognise (St. John xvi. 12, 13). And indeed, in following this policy of accommodation, was He not but conforming to the method of God's Revelation from the beginning, and setting an example to the preacher of His own Gospel for all time? St. Paul was only continuing his Master's procedure when he

reminded his Corinthian converts, "I fed you with milk, not with meat, for ye were not yet able to bear it" (1 Cor. iii. 2). And is not this policy still to-day characteristic of the Divine teaching through the world of Nature, of History, of Spirit? Is it not so, indeed, with all true education—a gradually progressive enlightenment, and consequently progressive requirements as the growing knowledge qualifies the student to meet them?

Bearing in mind, then, our Lord's wise and sympathetic repression of His demands upon the capacities of His hearers, we are not surprised to find that, in regard to <sup>His</sup> neutrality; points of mere intellectual interest, He was not concerned to go behind the conventional standpoint, provided that, in thus accommodating Himself to it, He was not countenancing any moral error. And it was a matter which had no bearing upon men's moral character, whether they regarded the Book of Jonah as history or as parable. It was therefore no part of His mission to support either the one view or the other. If (as we have seen above) the general opinion of the day received it unquestioningly as a historical record, then as such He was at liberty to treat it,

or, rather, to reason from their conception of it, for the particular purpose which He had in mind ; the popular estimate of the narrative was ready to hand at His service, and was suitable enough for the limited use which He proposed to make of it.

In further illustration of His deliberate aloofness in regard to the literary history of the Old

*e.g. on the authorship of Psalms.* Testament, we may recall His tacit acceptance of the popular language about the Psalms. The entire Psalter was generally quoted by the Jews of His day under the name of "David," as that of the poet most prominently connected with the collection by the ecclesiastical traditions of the nation. Hence in His reference to Psalm cx. (St. Matt. xxii. 43-45) He reasons with the ecclesiastical authorities by facing them with a plain inference from their own conventional association of David with that Psalm ; without, however, necessarily committing Himself to a Davidic authorship for the hymn, any more than we ourselves, when we quote "Isaiah," imply any acceptance of the assumption that the whole book was written by one prophet.

The mere fact, then, that, for the purpose of

a familiar illustration, our Lord refers His hearers to a well-known story in their sacred literature, affords no warrant for supposing that He sets His seal upon the historicity of its narrative. So much for the first of the series of questions propounded at the opening of this chapter.

And if the line of thought which we have been following be correct, it will probably have prepared us to meet at this point the last of those problems, viz. Whether it was not imperative to our Lord's stern rebuke of the Pharisees in St. Matt. xii. 41, that the repentance of Nineveh should have been an actual historical occurrence? We reply, without any fear of detracting from the honour of His Name, that it was *not*; and that to imagine necessities which do not exist is simply to create difficulties which provoke a life-or-death collision between our two equally God-given faculties of faith and common sense.

He was merely taking up a proverbial expression (as when, on another occasion, He used the common phrase about a camel passing through the eye of a needle), an expression which had arisen out of the popular reading of the story of

Jonah, in order to convey the same home-thrust which He elsewhere directed through the warning that “many shall come *from the east and the west*, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness” (St. Matt. viii. 11, 12). The term “the men of Nineveh” stood for a remarkable power of response to the Voice of God among those from whose naturally disadvantaged position it was least to be expected ; and the paradox suggested by that familiar expression shall, He says, be fully realised, to the discomfiture of those who had hitherto had on their side all the advantages. In other words, it is not the strictly personal reference, but the general idea embodied in the expression, that is His point.

But what is to be said to our central queries above ? If the case of Jonah was to supply a

**III. The** real “sign” of our Lord’s descent into  
“sign” of Hades and consequent Resurrection  
**Jonah.**

(St. Matt. xii. 40), was it not essential that a historical individual should actually have passed through the typical experience which the Book describes in connection with Jonah ?

Yet, here again, an affirmative answer could only proceed from an incomplete understanding of our Lord's use of the term "a <sup>The meaning</sup> sign." He is not taking oath (so to <sup>of a</sup> "sign"; speak) upon an assured *fact* of past history to confirm His announcement of an impending event; for that coming event would soon be established before His hearers by its actual occurrence, without the need of confirmation by the story of Jonah. No, as usual, it is not for the present occasion, but with a view to a subsequent situation, that He is sowing His seed; it is not to secure their conviction at that moment that He is aiming, but rather to make sure that, when the approaching event shall have taken place, they shall have received from Him beforehand the means for correctly estimating its significance. In a word, He is referring them, as He so often did, back to the *principle* illustrated or enforced by a passage of their own recognised sacred writings; viz. that when His own Resurrection from Hades shall have been accomplished, an independent clue towards understanding its necessity and meaning could be obtained from the moral embodied in that section of the story of Jonah to which He was directing their attention.

So it is important to observe with accuracy that He does not say “as surely as Jonah was . . . so certain is it the Son of Man shall . . .”; but rather His point is that “on the same principles of moral necessity as are illustrated by the experience of Jonah in the story, so by virtue of the same laws must the Son of Man . . .”

What He sees in the story, therefore, is not a historic occurrence, to warrant the possibility its bearing on of another somewhat similar occurrence; but, rather, a pointed illustration of the general principle of moral discipline, its method, and its purpose. Under the form of a narrative, a popular section of their Bible effectively set out before His hearers the fundamental truths that (1) disobedience must be purged out by discipline; (2) but that, when that discipline has effected its purpose, it is terminated; (3) that it is discharged when it has begotten in the offender a full spirit of obedience; and (4) that this completed spirit of obedience carries with it a moral strength which avails, under God, to accomplish otherwise impossible tasks of unlimited dimensions.

This, He would remind His hearers, was the process of moral education and equipment through

which Jonah is represented in the story as being brought : the same discipline, with the like purpose, would be seen in the coming catastrophe, and would be fulfilled in the triumphant reinstatement of His own life as the Son of Man. *and on His own ex-perience.*

For it was as "the Son of Man" that He was about to pass through that catastrophe to that reinstatement, *i.e.* not by reason of any independent personal necessity on His own part, but as the Representative of disobedient Man—of whose nature (as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews explains, chap. ii. 14) He partook for this express purpose. In this capacity He, like Jonah, had to be 'made perfect through sufferings' (*id. ver. 10*), 'learning obedience by the things which He suffered' (chap. v. ver. 8); and in His case, similarly with that of Jonah, though in incomparably higher degree as His Personality surpassed that of Jonah (St. Matt. xii. 41—"a greater than Jonah is here"), the fruits of the completed process of this education would be seen in the supernatural success of His subsequent mission to the Nineveh of the world. The full range of this prospect is only to be discerned in the work of His Church (which is still *His* working, because inspired and

effectualised by His indwelling vitality alone) in drawing the hearts of all men to Him as 'crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death' (Heb. ii. 9); but this remoter outlook was hardly His immediate purpose in the reference which we have been considering, though it is implicit in that reference, and we shall return to the subject later (Chapter IX.).

Meanwhile, to summarise our general conclusion upon this subject, we may say that, while our Lord's use of the Book does not necessarily imply that it is "a true story" in the sense of being a record of historic occurrences in the outward life of a single individual, yet it emphatically does mean that it is "a true story" in the more important sense that the laws of interior spiritual experience set forth in it are true, and control the entire process whereby God brings every one of His erring children back to their true destiny. The principles of the Divine dealing with the soul of Man which it aims to express, are essential and permanent realities for every member of a sin-damaged stock—realities revealed all the more pointedly and clearly by the narrative-setting in which they are embodied; and therefore our

Lord expressly proposes to His hearers that, by virtue of His complete identification of Himself with that stock as "the Son of Man," the doctrinal import of this section of the Jonah-story would, for devout eyes, throw a flood of light upon the great facts with which His nation would soon be faced, in His own Death and Resurrection.

Pausing for one moment, to revert from the particular detail of our Lord's quotation to our general viewpoint of the whole Book, we may perhaps venture, with all reverence, to illustrate our impression from the case of the most famous allegory in our English language. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is not dismissed from the serious attention of intelligent readers because it conveys much of its purpose through lively figures of giants and lions and other reminiscences of "fairy-tale" literature: on the contrary, the profound truths of the soul which it was written to set forth are discerned all the more readily, and retained in the memory all the more surely, by the aid of all this symbolism. The same quick intuition which dissociates the book from the literature of physical biography, with equal promptness recognises that it is a true account of realities in the spiritual life—and

that not of an isolated individual, but of every sincere learner in the school of Jesus Christ.

Indeed it is interesting to notice, in conclusion, the contradictory issues reached by an extreme

**A contrast.** literalist view of writings in which the imagination plays a large and purposeful part.

On the one hand, it maintains that every detail in the story of Jonah must have been a concrete fact—an actual and visible occurrence in the material world. On the other hand, in the case of Bunyan's allegory, it insists that, because he feigns to have dreamt it, every part of it *must* have been dreamt, so that each separate item in the local setting of the story must have sprung entirely from his imagination ; and (in the teeth of every sympathetic reader's natural appreciation of local identifications for spots depicted in the writings of Charles Lamb, Dickens, Tennyson, George Eliot, etc.) it resents the friendly researches which, with no trivial success, have definitely associated some of its scenery with actual localities in Surrey and Kent.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

BUT our Lord's references are to two incidental points in the story, which, although (especially, of course, in the use which He made of them) of deep interest and suggestiveness, are each more or less subsidiary to the general broad purpose in our author's mind. Viewed as a coherent whole, the Book would seem to have been written with the dominant intention of proclaiming a bold and determined protest against the rigid dichotomy of the popular Jewish outlook upon the world of mankind, according to which God's interest was strictly confined to the family of Abraham, while all the rest of humanity was accursed and irrevocably doomed to eternal rejection. And the permanent value of the Book is firm-based upon the fact that this natural tendency of the human heart towards contraction of sympathy is always in operation, and is a

standing part of the opposition to the Spirit of the Universal Christ. The moral of the parable is equally needed to-day as a vigorous corrective both of a false patriotism which recognises no common interests and duties with other nations, and, yet more especially, of a Christ-less Christianity which would in any way limit the obligations of membership in the Christian Society towards the non-Christian peoples.

Let us try to realise the situation which our author attacks. Like Jonah, the family of

**The failure of the Jewish Church.** Israel had been elected and commissioned by God for the ultimate

purpose that it should be His standing witness to the Gentile world—see Gen. xxii. 18; Exodus xix. 6<sup>a</sup>; Isaiah xlvi. 6, 7, etc. And Jonah's reluctance to testify in Nineveh, his chagrin at its conversion, and his attachment to a mere vegetable for the sake of its serviceableness to himself, effectively satirise the spirit of the Jewish Church in its refusal of its commission, its rigid grasp of all spiritual privilege for itself, and its selfish indifference to the destiny of the outside world. For this deliberate and persistent rejection of its vocation our author sees that the Church had been cast into the sea of the Gentile world,

and swallowed up by Babylon—a figure of speech which appears also, and with a similar reference, in Jeremiah li. 34<sup>b</sup>, 44, and St. Matt. xxi. 21, though our Lord's allusion is to a later and final fulfilment. In our author's day, however, the judgment upon the faithless Church had been but temporary; in response to its cries of penitence, it had been rescued, voluntarily set at liberty by Cyrus (Ezra i. 1-4) as Jonah by the sea-monster, restored to place in its own land again, and recommissioned for its original duty.

But the old selfish habit lingered on, and it is against this survival that our author directs the latter part of his story, in which he depicts Prophetic Jonah's resentment against protests. the assurance of salvation for the Ninevites. For although, after the Return from Babylon, there were stirrings of a gentler mind towards the ignorant heathen, yet the Church as a whole looked upon them as untouchables, outcasted them from God's recognition, longed for His open destruction of them, and even murmured at the delay in the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies against them. Against this malevolent spirit of exclusiveness there had long flowed a broad stream of testimony; springing, first, from the

fountain-head of the Church's original Charter (page 40) : fed by the records of such incidents as the mutual ministrations of the Widow of Zarephath and the prophet Elijah (1 Kings xvii.\*), so manifestly suggestive of the reciprocal services of the World and the Church, with the consequent duties of each to each : further swollen by the wider Churchmanship of various Psalmists (*e.g.* Psa. ii. 10-12 ; xxxiii. 8 ; lxvii. 4 ; xcvi. 7-9, etc.) : and reaching its full dimensions in the protests of prophets, such as Jer. xviii. 7, 8 ; Isaiah xlvi. 22, 23 ; lxvi. 18-23 ; or in the express Gentile interests of Amos.

But our author makes a yet more definite effort, and on a larger scale : he sets himself to show how this Jewish exclusiveness subverts the whole position in which the race had been placed at its election, by representing Jonah as stiffly disallowing to the Gentile world the very terms which had secured that position from God to their ancestor Jacob. For it was through prevailing as a prince with God in prayer that Jacob had averted the nemesis

The crowning expostulation.

\* In which connection it is interesting to recall the Jewish tradition that Jonah was the son of this widow, whom Elijah raised to life.

which had hitherto dogged his life of self-will, and had assured the Divine favour to himself and his line (Gen. xxxii. 28). Yet it was this same method of propitiation, by the fervent prayer of a converted heart, that Jonah would have withheld from the Ninevites—and that in the face of the standing memorial which led him, as an Israelite, to refrain from eating the sinew of the hip (*id.* ver. 32). So powerless over conduct is the mere conventional observance of an outward rite apart from any eye for the interior principle to which the rite is the index-finger! Indeed it may be questioned whether in any literature outside the New Testament we can find a more tender and generous presentment of God's love towards His world than in this anonymous little pamphlet against the fanatical bigotry of the popular theology.

How completely its conception of God out-distances that of the Judaism with which we are familiar in the New Testament era  
is evidenced from the summary of the **A contrast;**  
Book given by the Pharisee Josephus (A. J. IX.  
x. 2), who entirely omits any mention of the conversion of the Ninevites, and of God's rebuke of Jonah for his jealousy thereat. The New

Testament companion-picture to the story of  
and a Jonah is our Lord's parable of the  
parallel. Prodigal Son, in which He confirms  
our author's picture of the Divine compassion for  
the Ninevites by the account of the father's  
tender welcome of the returning prodigal, and  
takes up God's remonstrance against Jonah's  
uncharitableness in the father's expostulation  
with his elder son—in which latter case it is  
noticeable that, as in that of Jonah, the story  
closes without any hint as to the effect produced  
by the rebuke.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CHRIST-WARD REACH OF THE STORY

FROM a survey of the author's immediate purpose in regard to the conditions of his own day, our eyes are drawn on to a more distant prospect. Under the mission of Jonah <sup>The mission</sup> is represented the catholic duty for <sup>of Jonah,</sup> <sup>and of Jesus</sup> which the Israelite Church received <sup>Christ.</sup> its charter ; but this vocation that Church, like Jonah, resented and refused—indeed it petrified in the perverted conceit that the other races of mankind, to whom it had been commissioned as a source of blessing, must be left to remain under a just and permanent curse. It was doubtless this popular attitude towards the Gentile world that our Lord had in view when, in the service of the position which He was Himself momentarily feigning, He suggested that a work of mercy for the Syro-phenician woman would bring Him within the scope of the common proverb about

"taking the children's bread and casting it to the dogs" (St. Mark vii. 27). And perhaps it was because he saw no adequate warrant for a general reversal of this hateful assumption among his fellow-Churchmen, that even at the end of his allegory our author leaves us in the dark as to any satisfactory change of mind in his Jonah.

But in the fulness of time, when the measure of opportunity for God's Ancient Church had been completely filled up, there came One Who completely embodied in His Own Person this ideal of a world-embracing vocation, and endowed with a new principle of reproductive life, derived direct from His Own Person, a Church which should henceforth take in hand the effectual realisation of that ideal as a permanent and essential policy. And so it comes to pass that, over and above the particular accessory detail which we were considering in Chapter IV., the figure of Jonah stands out from the pages of the Old Testament in an express general relationship to the Person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

It is true that in the conduct of Jonah the testimony to the outside obligations of the Church

was very imperfectly set forth ; his attitude at the outside was one of flat refusal, and his response even to the last reluctant <sup>The negative</sup> and grudging. But such features are <sup>and positive</sup> <sub>side of a</sub> an essential mark of the human ‘type.’ element in the hero ; and some such traces of imperfection are frankly and significantly preserved by the inspired writers of the Old Testament in all the characters which they present to us as collectively, “by divers portions and in divers manners” (Hebrews i. 1), comprising the prefiguration of Jesus Christ in the Ancient Church. Indeed without this phenomenon there would have been serious risk lest such characters should impress us with a feeling of unreality, as out of touch with actual human nature ; in which case their apparent faultlessness would have frustrated the purpose for which their lives were handed down to posterity. It is on this ground that the avowed imperfections in the characters of these Old Testament heroes are a striking token of the controlling and guiding influence of the Holy Spirit in the making of the sacred records, for they have their own place to fulfil in the composition of a “type”—a type, by virtue of its human nature, being no less suggestive by its contrasts,

than by its resemblances, to the Antitype. And in the case of Jonah, especially, they are essential to the author's method ; because, without some such limitations to his mental outlook upon the world of men, Jonah would not have been a representative of the Jewish mind : he would not have spoken to them as one of themselves, with the penetrating force of a character from within their own Church. And it might well be asked, What chance of winning serious attention at all would have accompanied the picture of a prophet coming from the outside world to so prejudiced and exclusive a race ? As a matter of fact, our author was obliged, by his very plan, to combine in his picture of Jonah something of the popular narrow-mindedness amongst his people, which he set himself to expose in its faultiness, alongside of that correspondence with the universality of the Divine Love, which he wished to set forth in all its attractiveness ; and it is remarkable how he has succeeded in doing both. And so it is that, despite the essential limitations to his character, Jonah's fulfilment (such as it was) of the Jewish vocation, in the case for which he was commissioned, points us onward to the more perfect realisation of that vocation ; firstly, as set forth

in the earthly life of Jesus Christ, and then as continued (in the transmitted power of His heavenly life) by His Catholic Church to the end of time.

And, in order the more expressly to arrest our attention to this Christ-ward bearing of the allegory, there were introduced—under <sup>Particular</sup> the impulse of the Holy Ghost, Whose <sup>resemblances.</sup> prompting must surely be responsible for these features of the composition—certain incidental details which strangely correspond to facts in the earthly experiences of Jesus Christ, such as Jonah's three-days' penalty and his remarkable influence over the simple heathen ; to which our Lord expressly calls the attention of His hearers, as instances from the quarry of suggestion, in regard to His own Mission, contained in their ancient Scriptures (St. Matt. xii. 40 ; xvi. 4).

It is here that we find one of the permanent values of this allegory, in that it sets forth (not in the form of abstract statements, which might only capture the interest and understanding of the few, but through the more readily effectual means of a moral tale) certain principles as essential to the life of service under the One God of the whole earth ; and these principles received

their only complete satisfaction in the free-will service of the life of Jesus Christ. So that the little Book forms a directory—none the less remarkable for its author's being, if at all, but dimly conscious of its ultimate significance (I St. Peter i. 11)—to certain fundamentals in the Mission of the Saviour of the world. For He too was, first of all, jettisoned by perishing humanity as a propitiatory victim (St. John xi. 50-52); then restored to life with enhanced powers (Rom. i. 4); and finally, through the Church in which is perpetuated His living Presence and Influence on earth, a Preacher of repentance and reconciliation unto the furthest and darkest bounds of God's human family—‘gathering into one the children of God that are scattered abroad’—in accordance with His own declaration that “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Myself” (St. John xi. 52; xii. 32).

## CHAPTER VII

### TRUTHS BY THE WAY

BUT our Lord, as we have said, only resorted to the Book of Jonah, on the two occasions preserved in the Gospels, for the sake of two points in the story; which by no means cover the range of its purpose, or exhaust its significance. Yet, in so doing, He affords us an example of the attention which is due to incidental features, independently of the main drift and intention, in any part of Holy Writ. He does the same when He extracts a phrase from the narrative of the call of Moses at the Bush, as implicitly assuring the continuance of life after death (St. Mark xii. 26, 27); or cites the opening verse of Psa. cx., to suggest the Divinity of the Messiah (St. Matt. xxii. 43-45): though the point which He makes is no part of the writer's purpose in either passage.

And the variety of suggestive thoughts which are to be gathered by the way, as we follow our

author along the course of his main purpose, testify to the depth of his insight into the facts of life and to the soundness of his convictions.

I. Thus we cannot but notice, first, the loftiness and width of *his conception of God*. Broadly 1. **His know-** expressed, the problem with which the **ledge of God**. Book sets itself to deal is the conflict between the two alternative methods of combating human sin—the two attitudes being represented respectively by the two prominent *dramatis personæ*, God and Jonah. It is the standing dilemma between Justice and Mercy, between hatred of the sin and love for the sinner, between the Pharisees and Jesus, between Donatist exclusiveness and Catholic hope.

Jonah's fundamental error of principle, by which he was fast-set to his conviction that **God's deal-  
ings con-  
ditioned by  
man;** Nineveh ought to be destroyed, is shown to lie in forgetfulness that God's threatenings, no less than His promises, are strictly and justly *conditional*. Man has not only his rights, but, even further, his opportunities and capacities, in regard to the evolution of his destiny; and God's dealing with him, after having provided him with all necessary counsel and helps, is decided by exact

consideration for Man's use or neglect of those endowments, according to the degree in which each individual or race has received them.

This is shown first, preparatorily, in the case of Jonah personally, through the Divine forbearance in undertaking the discipline of his character (chap. i.) ; in extending to him the forgiveness expressed by the renewal of his commission (iii. 1) ; and in the continued patience which still condescends, even after his subsequent obduracy, to reason with him and to afford him a clue to the truer outlook (iv. 4-11).

All this, however, is accessory, though intended to facilitate appreciation for the principles of the Divine mercy towards the Ninevites, as due in equity to the practical character of their response to His messenger. *They* turned from the "evil" of their way, and *God* turned from the "evil" that He had been previously obliged to contemplate against them (iii. 10) ; man's repentance involves repentance with God. It was precisely because God is of the character which Jonah (even while he intuitively asserts it in chap. iv. 2<sup>c</sup>) so fiercely resents (iv. 1), that He was merciful,

not only to the penitence of Nineveh, but even to the reluctance of Jonah himself.

Put into a nutshell, the contention of the story is that Jehovah's position as the Sole Sovereign of the whole earth can only be rationally maintained on the supposition of His Infinite Compassion ; and that, conversely, the fact of His Mercy towards all men follows of moral necessity from His Universal Overlordship. Then, as a result of His Universal Sovereignty, His Spirit must have power, and, as an expression of His Infinite Pity, It must be seeking to use that power, *throughout the world*. Consequently wherever there are, in response to His influence, among men of any race whatever, sincere stirrings of self-shame and an honest hunger after righteousness, there God in equity accords His recognition (Comp. Acts x. 34, 35). And from this quality of His Mercy there passes out a reaction upon His Justice, whereby His righteous threatenings against Sin are made conditional ; so that the denunciations of the Jewish prophets against the heathen were all capable of being reversed by a change of heart, on the part of those against whom they were directed. Thus, carried by the

and of the world at large.

Spirit to see into the mysteries of God in heaven, our writer realised that whilst, in regard to His Mercy, God would tolerate no limits such as the bigotry of the prophet would set to its reach ; yet, in regard to His Judgments, His Love only longed to see His penal purposes frustrated by those upon whom they were necessarily impending, and by whom alone they could be turned aside (St. James ii. 13<sup>b</sup>).

And, as an accessory feature, we notice, from the machinery of the story, that this higher goodness of God is seen also in the very ~~Their appro-~~ means which He employs to bring His ~~priateness.~~ merciful discipline into men's lives. They are never irrelevant or forced upon us from strange quarters, but arise directly out of the actual course along which we are steering our existence ; and it is this appropriateness of origin and nature which qualifies the discipline to touch the soul so readily and pointedly. Jonah goes his own way, his mind completely possessed and dominated by his own obstinate ideas as to the right attitude towards Nineveh ; and it is through experiences naturally springing out of that self-chosen path—the tempest and the sea-monster, the gourd and the sirocco—that God speaks to his

conscience with such painstaking sympathy and accurate understanding. Thus, to the faithful soul trained by carefully considered experiences, the nature of a chastisement furnishes an index-finger to the fault which has called it forth ; and, correspondingly, the nature of an infirmity realised suggests the self-discipline whereby we may judge ourselves, that we be not judged of God (1 Cor. xi. 31).

II. Then, alongside with the author's sublime <sup>2. His know-</sup> and inspiring conception of God, we ~~ledge of man.~~ observe his deep *insight into the heart of Man.*

Though the artist's touches are few and rapid, how vividly they set out before us the power

<sup>Human</sup> and persistency of Man's self-will !  
~~self-will:~~ Jonah would have been willing enough to play the prophet of Jehovah, at all costs and with all earnestness, to his own people ; but the instructions to go where his God really needed him, because that destination lay outside the limits imposed by his own racial prejudice, aroused his bitterest opposition. It is not difficult to do work for God, and large work, where the sphere accords with our own pet theories or inclinations ; but when the purposes

that He has in view for our part of the world lead Him so to order our life as to locate our service among uncongenial or unpromising conditions, then comes the real test to show whose will it is that reigns within us.

And yet Man's estimate of the things that go to make up his life, and his life's opportunities, is by nature superficial enough ! The <sup>its short-</sup> material world around us, and the <sup>sightedness,</sup> conditions amid which our life is passed, affect our *feelings* strongly ; but feelings are not meant to be decisive of duty. Feelings should only inspire us to the investigation of *principles* ; the environment amid which our duty is placed is meant to become the soil in which should grow up the seeds of ethical ideals and moral purpose. Jonah lightly accepted the comfort afforded to his body by the gourd ; but he had no thought for the mercy of Him Who had provided the gourd, or it should have touched him with a kindred kindness of heart for the Ninevites.

It is noticeable too how, in exact accordance with human nature, this obtuseness had grown upon him with his continued indulgence of his self-will. It is true that in the earlier stages of the storm at sea

<sup>and its  
progressive  
mischief.</sup>

he was "fast asleep"; his conscience was dormant, he was impervious to the moral suggestiveness of the situation, and therein presents an apt figure of the Jewish Church in its insensibility to the Divine judgment which was threatening its final destruction for its continued refusal of its trust on behalf of the Gentile world. But, when aroused, he was capable enough, at that point in his history, of drawing the right conclusion against himself: the disorder in the realm of Nature suggested that something was out of order in the sphere of God's purposes, and Conscience promptly tells him that *he* is the disorderly factor. In the latter part of the story, however, this readiness of intuition has been atrophied, as a result of his hardening of his heart. He preached in Nineveh, it is true, and with a fiery force which compelled attention; but the picture of his heart, as drawn by the writer, suggests that he did so because he enjoyed the denunciations which he poured out upon its people, and looked forward with gratification to the fulfilment of his announcements as a terrible warning to any other heathen power which might ever contemplate the subjugation of Jehovah's chosen race. Therefore that obedience

of the Ninevites which was pleasing to God "displeased Jonah exceedingly" (iv. 1); and, while God 'turned from His fierce anger' (iii. 9), His prophet was wholly given up to indignation. The story was not written as a condemnation of individual self-love, for which purpose it would perhaps hardly add much to the teaching already supplied elsewhere in the Old Testament; so that Calvin would seem to have run off the main line in his suggestion that Jonah's anger was due to his caring more for his own reputation as a prophet, which would suffer through the non-fulfilment of his denunciations, than for the welfare of Nineveh or for the honour of his God. But the story *was* written to condemn national and ecclesiastical self-love: Jonah's bitter disappointment was due to a false patriotism, which calculated that, if the enemy of his people were spared, then his nation was doomed; and to a mean and narrow Churchmanship, which would restrict to his own race alone the tender parental care of Him Who is the Father of all.

Our last subject leads us on to notice another, and large, token of our writer's acquaintance with the working of the human heart, in his

appending a second part to his allegory. From one point of view his tale might have closed with

**Conversion** Jonah's obedient departure on his re-  
also merges newed mission at chap. iii. 3<sup>a</sup>, or with  
into a con- its accomplishment in the deliver-  
tinuous process. ance of Nineveh at ver. 10. But,

exactly because it is so strictly true to human nature, it does not. No conversion is assured of finality in this present life of probation; and the continuance of the narrative into a second part, is precisely in accord with the inveterate tendency of our enfeebled nature to hark back to type—a recurrence of similar conditions brings up again the old liability to an infirmity which we had learnt to hate. In the first part of the story Jonah had learnt outward conformity with the Will of God—there is no longer disobedience *in act*; but formal obedience does not necessarily spring from the heart, and Jonah is yet unconverted *in will*. Thus, while the first part deals with the painful process of learning inevitable submission to the Divine Will, the second part must follow to show the need of unanimity with that Will; God cannot be satisfied with the enforced service of a slave—He must have the co-operation of

freewill, of moral conviction, with the pulse of the heart, and through one-ness of our ideals with His own.

Or the lingering viciousness of our mingled constitution may show itself under a slightly different form. We pray (like Jonah in Chap. ii.) for further conversion, and seem to rise empowered through our prayer ; but, when face to face in the flesh with the actual trial which at the time of our prayer had been only a vision, the old depressing weakness reasserts itself. But, through the grace of the Holy Spirit directing our writer, his tale, whilst so true to human nature, is true also to God : to the last, as in the case of Jonah, God is at hand for our assistance, to reason with us, to steady us, to inspire us with His own patient love and trust.

Once more, we remark the writer's knowledge of Man's psychological needs. After the sharp discipline on board ship which checked Jonah's rebellious purpose and recalled him to himself, he must have The work of self-reflection. time *to think* ; and this the allegory provides in the figurative episode of his seclusion within the sea-monster. This order of procedure is the same as was followed in the somewhat parallel

case of Saul of Tarsus, after he was originally brought to himself by the express intervention of Jesus Christ on his self-devised journey to Damascus : he was first left shut up in the retreat of his blindness for three days (Acts ix. 9), and then withdrawn for the longer retirement of three years in Arabia (Gal. i. 17, 18), to bethink himself before being finally sent forth to the mission of his life. The visitation which sharply pulls up the sinner on his headlong course may be sudden and irresistible ; but his psychological constitution requires time to assimilate the full bearings of the experience, for his nature is complex and the force which has laid hold of him has many parts to transform. God hears, and acknowledges, the appeal of Jonah immediately it is put up (ii. 2), and the process of his *mental* liberation begins at once ; but the final point, in his *bodily* release and consequent restoration to active service, was not reached till the third day (i. 17<sup>b</sup>).

III. Lastly, from our author's enlightened conception of God and his profound acquaintance with the heart of Man, there follows naturally that tender *appreciation for Natural Religion* which is so prominent throughout his little Book. It is no slight mark

3. His sympathy for Gentile religion;

of his inspired skill in the persuasive and stimulative methods of the preacher and teacher, that he represents the heathen peoples as not merely the larger field of the Church's *duty*, but as providing from the sacred recesses of their deeper nature a real *inducement and attraction* for the Church's prosecution of that duty.

This is worked out, first, in the carefully painted picture of the heathen mariners. Heathen religion may be based upon Fear, <sup>in the case of</sup> but a religion of Fear is more productive of good to the character than the irreligion of moral obtuseness ; the religious susceptibility of the pagan seamen was more awake than the prophet, until he was aroused by very shame at the contrast between himself and them (i. 5, 6). And their religion is practical : having by word of mouth invoked the Divine help, they set themselves to find out in what directions it calls them to act ; the objective of Discipline in recognised to be Conduct (ver. 7). Nor is their action to be hasty and ill-considered : they do not leap to the conclusion that the verdict of the lot-casting indicates the reverend-looking stranger as the criminal—it can only be pointing to him as the person to tell them who is the

offender (ver. 8<sup>a</sup>). And even by his self-accusation they will not be led straight away to violate the impression conveyed by his appearance until, in response to further inquiries (ver. 8<sup>b</sup>), he makes an acknowledgment which they are compelled to recognise as fatal (vers. 9, 10). Yet further, so delicate is their sense of honour that, down to the last possible moment of delay, they are seen labouring with a consciousness that Jonah's life was being surrendered to save theirs, and they seem to shrink from the responsibility which this would lay upon their own lives ; some glimmering intuition of the truth that "he that would save his life shall lose it" led them to hesitate lest, by accepting the deliverance of their own lives at the price of even an individual stranger's, they should only pass from the present impending death to another and more terrible destruction (vers. 13, 14). And finally, as they disappear on the tranquil horizon, the author cannot allow us to think of these honourable men as going off unimpressed by the striking occurrences which they have witnessed : with one last touch to his picture of the storm he suggests a glimpse of them as engaged in reverent worship and votive pledges to the new God (the "LORD"—contrast

the general term in vers. 5, 6, with the specific Name in vers. 14, 16, after Jonah's explanation in ver. 9) of Whom they had learnt under such solemn circumstances (ver. 16).

All this may be lightly dismissed from the world of real life, as so much "Oriental word-painting," by those who, with an ignorance truly "brutal" in both senses of the word, practically dehumanise all the child-races under the classification of "niggers"; but those who have had the enlightening privilege of intimate association with any heathen peoples know that all the natural graces thrown by our author into his sketch are to be found everywhere among them.

The same sympathetic habit of mind towards the untutored spiritual constitution of "the natural man" animates his even more rapid sketch of the Ninevites in chap. iii. The city was "great unto God" (ver. 3<sup>b</sup> marg.) in another besides the material sense; it had greatness of soul—a moral greatness, impressively manifested in the prompt and frank response of its inhabitants to the message of God. And their compunction of heart is similarly "great unto God" in its comprehensiveness; they make no distinctions in

and in that  
of the Nine-  
vites.

their self-reproach, no class seeks to exculpate itself by throwing the blame on others, all alike recognise the oneness of national responsibility, the guilt of any is the guilt of all (vers. 5<sup>b</sup>, 7<sup>b</sup>). And as this sensitiveness of soul, and solidarity of conscience, is especially credited to the Ninevites in order to furnish a vigorous and effective contrast to the stony-heartedness and spiritual dulness of the prophet, so do those who have been admitted to real touch with the lives of heathen races know that there are tender and generous spots in their hearts, coupled with an ingrained appreciation of the corporate life, which often shame the paltriness of soul, the narrow sympathies, and the social incoherence of an old and stereotyped Christianity.

## CHAPTER VIII

### METHOD AND STYLE

I. IN marked contrast to the varied stores of the author's wisdom, as incidentally suggested during his story, stands the fixed *Singleness of Purpose* with which he drives on his way. He decides each turn of his progress with sole regard for the one truth to which he is aiming to bring us home, without even a moment's apparent concern to clear up any accessory points suggested by his use of his materials ; nor is he to be drawn aside down any by-paths of moralisation or explanation, however interesting in themselves. He confines our attention strictly to the education of his hero in one particular doctrine, describing the process of that education, and establishing on grounds both Divine and human—but by methods of illustration rather than of discussion—  
1. Unity of purpose.

the intrinsic reasonableness and the vital necessity of that doctrine.

For this reason he does not concern us with the subsequent history of the sailors, or the details of the revival-preaching which roused the Ninevites to so remarkable a response ; and he is at no pains to discuss the natural history of the sea-monster (over which controversy has ground so much sawdust out of wooden-headed critics and apologists), or any other equally spontaneous introductions of the fictitious in his tale. All these are mere parts of the scaffolding, or stage-mechanism, of the allegory : the only obligation that he recognises as incumbent upon him is in regard to *the moral* of his story.

II. At the same time his concentration of effort upon his single purpose does not preclude, **2. Fulness of** it rather necessitates, *careful and detail. detailed painting* of the dominant elements in a character or scene or process.

Thus the touches which suggest the character of the mariners may be rapid, with the apparent lightness and ease of all true art, but they are complete in their vivid allusiveness ; and they depict the progressive working of minds that are consistent from first to last.

The same characteristic strikes us in the description of the Ninevite revival. The movement in the city is seen, as it were, step by step : it commences in the streets, it reaches to the palace, it returns to gather in the entire population with a force as irresistible as it is comprehensive. And it is met by a like fulness of response from the Heart of God, Whose all-inclusive compassion is effectively portrayed by the delicate final touch that it enfolds even the brute-creation (iv. 11).

In the same way the completeness of the Divine consideration for the infirmity of human nature is set forth in the detailed arrangements which Jehovah is represented as making for His final appeal to the better instincts of His misguided prophet (iv. 4-11) ; which remind us of the similarly careful dealing with Elijah, under similar conditions of mind, attributed to Him in 1 Kings xix. 4-18.

But it is in his delineation of the workings of his hero's heart that our author's thoroughness of characterisation is most punctiliously and effectively concerned. In this direction we are conscious of its influence throughout ; but we may specially single out the self-analysis attributed to Jonah in his "Confessions" (Chap. ii.), and

the conflict of his emotions in the vigorous closing drama between him and God (Chap. iv.).

III. Akin to this carefulness of character-drawing is the fulness and soundness of the **3. Practical** author's teaching *on the practical side of the religious life*, so far as his story brings him into contact with it. Thus chapter ii. shows us the completeness of his conception of Prayer, as the pouring-out of the whole soul in childlike simplicity of converse with God. We have, first, Jonah's confession; then the recounting of the several factors in his chastisement—as an expression of submissive acceptance, not of complaint; in accordance with which there follows the pleading of his faith and hope; next, the disavowal of the old wrong feelings; the promise of amendment; the vow of the thank-offering; and the brave closing doxology. All the several parts of Prayer—in the furthest reach of the term, as an activity of the soul in all departments of the personal relationship between the individual and God—are as duly represented as in a treatise on practical theology.

And the same doctrinal completeness is observable in the account of the conversion of the Ninevites (Chap. iii.). With the most rapid

touches we are shown their compunction (ver. 5<sup>a</sup>), penance (vers. 5<sup>b</sup>, 6<sup>b</sup>, 7<sup>b</sup>, 8<sup>a</sup>), confession (ver. 8<sup>b</sup>), and finally their active amendment (ver. 8<sup>c</sup>). But, again, it is all merely thrown out (so to speak) incidentally in passing, as a side-light on the road towards the goal upon which he keeps our eyes fixed.

IV. Another device which contributes effectually to the force of moral suggestion throughout the story is *a delicate allusiveness in the arrangement of parts*—an artistic **antitheses**; juxtaposition of characters and circumstances in quiet but unmistakable contrast. For the greater part of the way we are led along to our destination by the silent teaching of a series of positive and negative pictures, set together in pairs: the book is essentially a Book of Contrasts, which answer each to his fellow like the clauses of an antithetical parallelism in Hebrew poetry.

Thus, for instance, who does not feel the satire of the opening picture, which shows the prophet of Jehovah voyaging in the company of those who knew Him not, and silent characters about Him, nay, even needing to be awakened by them to call upon his God; when

he should himself have been at work, in exactly the opposite direction of the world, seeking to awaken the people of Nineveh on His behalf? The natural man is represented as more quickly sensitive to the message of God than His own prophet; and this, placed at the outset of the Book, is surely in itself a preparatory hint of its ultimate purpose. To the same effect the tender sensitiveness of the mariners to their responsibility for the life of their solitary fellow-man, reflects sharply upon Jonah's stony refusal of the duty, expressly enjoined upon him by his God, to the lives of the vast population in Nineveh. And this contrast is repeated under the form of their expostulation, "What is this that thou hast done?"—an expression which appears, from the other cases of its occurrence,\* to have been a conventional form of calling upon an offender to realise the enormity of his wrongdoing. The prophet, who has deadened his moral perception by subtle debating of duty, is rebuked by the simple-minded heathen; and he who had been commissioned to the ungodly of Nineveh has first to be recalled from his own

\* Comp. Gen. iii. 13; xii. 18; xxvi. 10; xxix. 25;  
2 Sam. xii. 21.

ungodly way by those who had enjoyed none of his advantages for knowing God. The same antithesis is presented even more plainly, if possible, in the second part of the story. The greatness of soul in the Ninevites is graphically set off against the small-mindedness of the prophet ; and their ready response to the Divine summons, though a summons of an entirely new and most exacting nature, throws a lurid light upon his sullen reluctance to serve the God with Whose righteous purposes he ought to have been thoroughly familiar and in harmony.

It is, indeed, evident that the characters of the sailors and the Ninevites are purposely so drawn as to make the strongest possible contrast to the vindictiveness of the Jews against the Gentile world, and their callousness to the preaching of their own prophets. And here again we remark the ‘ truth ’ of the story, in a deeper and wider sense than that of being an actual extract from an individual biography ; it is ‘ true ’ as depicting a standing phenomenon in the life of the ages, for still it happens day by day that untutored heathen put Christians to shame, and ‘ the uncircumcision which is by nature, in fulfilling the law, judges

those who, with the letter and circumcision, are transgressors of the law' (Rom. ii. 27).

But our author has yet other than human contrasts to add point to his exposure of his nation's unfaithfulness: he fills his pages with instances of obedience to the ordering of God. The elements of Nature (i. 4), the great fish (i. 17; ii. 10), the gourd, the worm, the sun, and the wind (iv. 6, 7, 8), all are portrayed as being naturally and entirely at the Divine beck and call—it is only the prophet who is *not*!

The case of the gourd, indeed, provokes a further and more elaborate comparison, in the

**The lesson through the gourd.** contrast between the worth of Jonah's interests in the vegetable and the value of the Ninevites with God.

Jonah had put none of his own life into the gourd, but God is the Father of men; Jonah had no personal right to the gourd, but God, as the Sovereign of all, has a sovereign's responsibilities to the Ninevites; the gourd only held its existence under a law of transitoriness, but it would violate the essential purpose of human life if the Ninevites were to perish; the gourd was of service to Jonah alone, but the lives of the

Ninevites were all bound up together by reciprocal action and reaction—and that, not merely for a day or two, but from generation to generation ; the gourd was but a solitary specimen from the lowest form of life, but the Ninevites were a vast multitude of human souls, whose spiritual disabilities were incomparably more worthy of pity than the physical helplessness of the gourd, whilst even their cattle rank far above the vegetable.

At the same time it is important to distinguish carefully that Jonah is not rebuked on the ground of his sympathy for the untimely fate of the gourd ; on the contrary, because the argument is *a fortiori*, the force of the antithesis lies in the point that his sympathy was right. He had intuitively taken the gourd into his heart, there had grown up an identity of interest between him and it, and it had become a part of his life. *Only* he must recognise, and the episode of the gourd was a dramatic parable which should have helped him to recognise, that the Ninevites had a yet better right to a place in the Heart of God, and that it was even more natural and equitable for God to respect the stake which He had in their life.

V. Allied to this silent but effective method of suggestion by sharp contrasts is an even more subtle touch which reminds us of 5. Irony. the "*irony*" of Sophocles, and that too in several of its forms. Thus, in chap. i. 5<sup>c</sup> we have a simple case of "irony of circumstances," in which Jonah's fancied security amid the extreme peril actually surrounding him satirises his supposed escape from his commission when it was really about to be imposed upon him with overwhelming insistence.

In chap. ii. 8 and 9<sup>c</sup> is an "irony of words." In acknowledging that life can only be realised in obedience to the Will of God for that life, Jonah is using language whose width of meaning he little understood or soon forgot, as was proved subsequently by his indignation when the repentance of the Ninevites showed that they had arrived at the same opinion; he was taken at his word, by the renewal of his commission, and his jealousy against the Ninevites immediately belied it.

In chap. i. 12 we have a striking "irony of suggestion," in that while Jonah intuitively recoils from the possibility that a boat's crew of sailors should lose their lives on his account, he is com-

pletely without compunction that the vast population of Nineveh should perish through his deliberate neglect. And, yet again, the story closes with a similar form of this irony. The thought of the cattle is thrown in, as it were, with a matter-of-course air, as if it ought not to be necessary to mention them ; but it suggests a caustic contrast to the narrowness of heart which would, equally as a matter of course, exclude even men from the interest and care of their Maker. And it is made all the more stinging by its forming in the Hebrew (as, fortunately, it is able to do also in our English Version) the last two words of the Book ; where its position reminds us of the similar favourite device of St. Luke for clinching an important section or paragraph with some striking and significant word or phrase at its close—of which the last word of the Book of the Acts marks a notable instance.

## CHAPTER IX

### JONAH AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

PASSING now to our final and furthest outlook from the standing-ground of this little allegory, we may first take with us on our way a reminder of the advantages which follow from the increased facilities for the study of the Old Testament in modern times.

So long as it was assumed that the story of Jonah was the strictly historical record of a single *Jonah as an* life, its appeal to Conscience had only *individual*. the limited force that belongs to the example of an individual. Human nature is always prone to accredit an individual with exceptional advantages of circumstances, or capacity, or treatment ; so as to excuse itself from copying his example altogether, or to content itself with following him at a long and increasing distance. In this way the individual element in an example may be allowed to detract seriously from the point and edge of its appeal ; which,

we may note in passing, is exactly the danger against which the Christian truth of the Communion of Saints is so solid a defence.

But, when once it is realised that Jonah is not an individual any more than the hero of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," but that he is <sup>Jonah as</sup> a typical embodiment of the Jewish <sup>a type.</sup> Church in its mistaken spirit of exclusiveness, then we have before us, focussed into the figure of a single personality, one of the main general lessons of the entire Old Testament history; and a collective example to the Catholic Church of Christ, which was called into being just because the ancient Particular Church had refused to fulfil the duty for which it had been selected.

And so we obtain, like travellers in a mountain-range, another view of an outstanding point which we have noticed before on our way, <sup>The permanent</sup> viz. that though the story of Jonah <sup>Jonah.</sup> may not be "true" in the popular usage of the word, as a literal account of an actual Jonah, yet it *is* true for all time as an exact picture of human conceptions of social relationship apart from the Mind of Christ—*i.e.* as a collective portrait, rather than as an individual record: which is something more significantly "true," because it depicts,

not a character which appeared once in history, but one that is always present. Only, in order that we may see this character the more readily and comprehensively, we need a particular concrete figure from which to begin our study of it ; and this it is the purpose of our little tract to put before us.

This may well be a reason why the Book closes, as it might seem for the moment, somewhat abruptly. The author is at no pains to tell us of any effect produced upon the mind of the prophet by God's justification of His ways, for that point was of no moment to his purpose ; the effect that *is* of importance is the effect upon ourselves. It is another token of the writer's artistic skill, and one thoroughly in accord with our taste in works of fiction to-day, that he adds not a single unnecessary detail at the close of his story : he drops Jonah straight away, so soon as there is no more part for Jonah to contribute to his plan—*i.e.* so soon as any further information would make his Jonah no longer a collective figure, or type, but a purely individual personality. And, by so doing, he surely emphasises, not only the unanswerableness of the Divine reasoning, but also the directness of its appeal to ourselves.

And the opening-out of the world since our author's day has made the necessity for this appeal all the more widespread. In *The need for the secular world* the tendency to *this teaching*, shortness of vision in the direction of man's social solidarity and its responsibilities, to miserable class-divisions and antagonisms, to sectional views of humanity, to prejudices based on distinctions of colour or racial type or civilisation, and, among ourselves in particular, to British insularity of interests and ideals, is inveterate and always at work. But in the Christian Church also we have the same vicious habit of the natural man to contend against. True, in the Church of Christ human nature has the advantage of a fuller knowledge, and richer stores of grace at its disposal in the endeavour to act upon that knowledge ; but it has not yet been completely and finally supernaturalised, and there still linger amongst us substantial relics of the old unworthy spirit to be overmastered and cast out. Here also we meet with a narrowing of mutual interest and concern, the spiritual selfishness of the individual or the parish, readiness to reprobate weaker brethren, party spirit, contraction of the world-wide responsibility attaching to every member

in the Universal Christ—all alike attesting the continued baneful activity of the Great Divider, and effectively ministering to his policy of debilitating separation among the children of One Father. Our eyes and hearts need to be perpetually undergoing the healthy process of opening and enlargement; we constantly require the tonic of this little tract, that Jonah may be as effective a revivalist-preacher among us of the Christian Church as he was to the less-advantaged Ninevites, till we all come to see and feel the full magnificent sweep of our commission to the entire human family of God. For in the truth set forth by this story of Jonah lies the essential difference between the Old Testament Church of the Law and the New Testament Church of the Incarnation; the principle of life attempted in the former worked out inevitably towards intensiveness and exclusion, that realised in the latter has made it constitutionally extensive and catholic.

Lest we should miss this permanent significance of Old Testament history, owing to its being **The twofold service of the Book;** conveyed under a broad and general form throughout the maze of its age-long course, it is gathered up for us into the personal portrait of an individual. Lest, on the other hand, we should be misled by the

individualist aspect of the Jonah-narrative into supposing that the missionary obligation is a mere sectional duty, attaching to certain members only within the Church, we have been brought to see that the figure of Jonah is a concentrated type of the entire Old Testament Church. The conception of a mission from the small and despised Church of Jehovah, in the person of a solitary representative, to one of the oldest and mightiest seats of worldly civilisation and splendour, is indeed a stimulating and sustaining parable of that moral greatness of character, of that dauntless ambition for the Divine glory, and of that burning passion for the satisfaction of men's profoundest needs, which ought to characterise the Church of the God Who for man's sake became Man.

Reading the Book as a whole in this light, and noting with what subtle—indeed, unconscious—skill each incidental touch illuminates its single purpose, we cannot but recognise that here, in the person of its author and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Old Testament has unwittingly supplied us with a distinct and special memorial of our Christian calling as the prophets of the One God to the great Nineveh of entire humanity ; that it may never be pronounced against us, as it

*a definite contribution to Holy Writ.*

was upon that Ancient Church, " who is blind but My servant, or deaf as My messenger that I send ? " (Isaiah xlvi. 19).

Nor shall we be surprised to be told by St. Jerome that it was the hearing of this short tract read aloud which first attracted Cyprian of Carthage, then a gay but gifted young aristocrat, to the more serious view of life which eventually brought him over from paganism to Christianity. And, to come to another date altogether, and to a somewhat different school of thought (whose comparative ' freedom ' in the general handling of the Old Testament may, nevertheless, make its testimony in this particular case only the more remarkable and welcome), we are prepared to sympathise with the verdict of the modern scholar \* who has characterised the Book of Jonah as " one of the deepest and grandest things ever written," and adds, " I should like to say to every one who approaches it, ' Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' "

\* Prof. C. H. Cornill.

THE END







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